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ABSTRACT

One of the problems that continues to plague teachers of foreign languages at the secondary and university levels is the students' use of a "pony," or literal translation, to assist them in completing their translation assignments. Due to the wide availability of such translations and the tendency for students to choose the path of least resistance, the use of such crutches is not bound to end. Though the author does not suggest that it is appropriate in all instances, it is her contention that teachers of foreign languages can guide students' use of the "pony" in ways that will work to their advantage rather than their detriment, as can be demonstrated through a popular language textbook from the early 17th century. The example discussed in this paper and an examination of the design methodology used by the author of the 17th century textbook also suggest that a new historical approach to instructional design is appropriate and beneficial for modern instructional designers, especially vis-a-vis modern foreign language pedagogy. (Contains 15 references.) (Author/AEF)

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A New Historical Approach to Instructional Message Design: The Case of the *Janua Linguarum* and Its Implications for Foreign Language Pedagogy

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Abstract

One of the problems that continues to plague teachers of foreign languages at the secondary and university level is the students' use of a "pony," i.e., a literal translation, to assist them in completing their translation assignments. Due to the wide availability of such translations and the tendency for students to choose the path of least resistance, the use of such crutches is not bound to end. Though I would not suggest that it is appropriate in all instances, it is my contention that as teachers of foreign languages, we can guide the students' use of the "pony" in ways that will work to their advantage rather than their detriment, as can be demonstrated through a popular language textbook from the early 17th century. The example discussed in this paper and an examination of the design methodology used by the author of the 17th century textbook also suggest the encouraging conclusion that a new historical approach to instructional design is appropriate and beneficial for modern instructional designers, especially vis-à-vis modern foreign language pedagogy.

Introduction

In this age of technological innovation and "advances," and especially in this very modern field of instructional design, a new historical approach to pedagogy might seem oddly misplaced. However, since we are confronting issues that are literally millennia old and that have been debated in the laboratories of experience for many centuries, we should not dismiss out of hand the solutions proposed and tested by teachers throughout the ages.

As both Classicist and instructional designer, my question is how a new historical approach to Classical language pedagogy, when viewed through the lenses of modern instructional design, informs foreign language pedagogy today. Though my interests and examples deal primarily with teaching ancient Greek and Latin, the methods revisited in this paper can be easily applied to teaching any non-native language.

At the forefront of the controversy in Classical language pedagogy in the last ten years are issues of the changing student profile. The complaints in the pedagogical discourse form a remarkably consistent refrain: the students will not study, the students do not have a foundational knowledge in grammar, the students have no motivation, the students have other priorities (Abbott, 1991; Gruber-Miller, 1998; Kitchell et al., 1996; Phinney, 1989; Sebasta, 1998).

This issue of the new model of student has also been at the forefront of instructional design and educational theory in recent years, but has been cast in a much more objective light. Rather than making a value judgment about their essential quality, intelligence, or background knowledge, educational researchers and theorists have attempted to describe *how* students learn; instructional designers, building on the findings of these educational researchers, have classified types of knowledge and produced theories describing how students learn each type *best*.

In recent years, in an attempt to shake off the shackles of the traditional "grammar-translation" method of language pedagogy inherited from their teachers and their teachers before them, Classical language teachers have largely switched over to a "more intuitive" and more modern approach dubbed the "reading" method (Burns & O'Connor, 1987; Davis, 1991; Gruber-Miller, 1998; Knudsvig & Ross, 1998; Phinney, 1989; Sebasta, 1998). The reading method, though a step in the right direction, is not, however, a panacea. We must continue to look in all corners, however unlikely, for new—or old—ideas that will help inspire language pedagogy with new life. It is in this spirit that I suggest it is time the past was exhumed and examined in the new light provided by modern theories. The eminent Hellenistic historian Peter Green noted that historical interpretation is largely affected by the zeitgeist of the era in which the historian works (1993). Thus, issues considered anew in each succeeding generation continue to yield rich insights. Unfortunately, the historical approach to Classical language pedagogy has been largely dispensed with in favor of more "modern" approaches (Phinney, 1989). Proponents of these approaches claim that they approximate a more authentic learning experience. This goal is a worthy one, and the efforts that have been made should be commended. However, by analogy with the historical insights gained in the last generation in areas such as Hellenistic history, gender studies, and oral poetic composition, I contend that the distantly historical approaches to Classical language pedagogy can reveal unexpected treasures when reviewed using a similar new historical approach.

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For the remainder of this paper I will focus on a few of the advantages that could accrue from employing one example of these "old" techniques and methodologies to the modern foreign language classroom. Many of these techniques do not simply provide a way to work around "obstacles" presented by the new profile of student characteristics; they actually work *with* the new generation of students and are, in addition, validated for modern use by modern educational and instructional design theories.

Problems of Foreign Language Pedagogy

Perhaps the most daunting problem facing foreign language students today is the tremendous amount of cognitive resources required for translation (what instructional designers would call "authentic whole-task practice"). While translating a single sentence students must analyze parts of speech, morphology, denotation of words, connotation of words, grammatical syntax, and word order, and then reconstruct the pieces into an idiomatic rendering in their native language; add to this the pressure of "performing" in front of peers and instructor or for a grade, and it becomes apparent that even in its simplest form (i.e., for the shortest sentences), the act of translation produces a nearly constant state of cognitive overload.

The teacher's most common solution to the problem of cognitive overload is to deconstruct the practice as far as possible into its various component parts, as is evidenced by the plethora of vocabulary drills, memorization of grammar rules, and morphology drills available in both computerized and paper form (Latousek, 1998). However, the connotation of vocabulary can only be understood in context, that is, in conjunction with other words, and therefore cannot be effectively practiced simply by drilling single word equivalents as though they were the times tables. The same is true for appreciating the style and interpreting the tone of an author or passage. The result of drilling individual component skills is, consequently, a decontextualized, fragmentary type of knowledge that is often difficult to integrate during authentic whole-task practice, i.e., translation. The dilemma, though, is that without making some of these component skills recurrent or automatic by drill-type practice, the task of translation is essentially hopeless for the novice.

The obvious solution to the instructional designer is to scaffold the authentic task at various levels by recombining component skills to form intermediate practice tasks. But identifying a solution is the easy part. The more difficult question is how to implement that solution. It is for answers to difficult problems like this that we can and should look to the past for illumination.

Bathe's Language Methodology

In the early 17th century, William Bathe, an Irish Jesuit stationed at Salamanca, Spain, wrote a stunningly successful language manual, the *Janua Linguarum* [*The Gate to Languages*], based on his innovative pedagogical theory. The textbook, designed for students of both modern and "scholarly" languages, saw numerous editions published throughout the 17th century and was used to teach at least 8 different languages. Surprisingly, 11,000 copies were printed in Puritan England alone—though, for obvious political reasons, without attribution to its Jesuit author. Bathe's book also formed the basis for several other pedagogical methods. For example, upon comparison with Bathe's text, the *Janua Linguarum Reserata* of John Comenius, which has come to be regarded as the first modern "textbook" in the West, is discovered to be little more than a cheap imitation of this well-known and widely-acclaimed text (Corcoran, 1911).

As an instructional designer, who by definition believes that a systematic approach to designing instruction will produce a superior instructional product, I consider the overwhelming success of the 17th century textbook a natural result of an underlying systematic instructional design. The introductory matter reveals an astounding anticipation of ISD models as well as a deep understanding and appreciation of factors that significantly affect learning, as the following discussion and passages from Bathe's text will show.

Analysis

As Allison Rossett so convincingly demonstrates in her recent exegesis (1999), the analysis phase of the design process is essential to the success of the design itself. Bathe was not unaware of the importance of defining the need for his method, the target population for his manual, the component tasks that constitute the authentic whole task (i.e., translation), and the objectives on which he would focus in creating his manual and explicating his method.

Needs Analysis

In the second chapter of the introduction to his first edition of the *Janua*, Bathe identifies the need for his new language methodology. He states:

> For learning languages...only two ways have yet been found: the 'rule-way,' such as grammar applied to note the concord of words, and the 'ruleless-way,' the ordinary plan of learners of common tongues through reading and speaking. The two ways are related to each other, in that the 'rule-way' gives more sureness, where the 'ruleless-way' more ease in learning. The former is to be preferred where the language is not in common use, the latter in case of a [modern] tongue. But if a 'via media' [middle way] can be thought out, which would equal the 'rule-way' in sureness, and the 'ruleless-way' in ease, it would beyond question be placed several degrees higher than either. Such a way we have here...undertaken to point out. (as cited in Corcoran, 1911, p. 72).

It is interesting that several centuries before Dave Merrill arrived on the instructional design scene, Bathe was driven by the mandate to make instruction more effective and efficient and consequently more appealing.

Target Population Analysis

Bathe defines the target audience for his method in the preface to the first edition of the *Janua Linguarum*: "this manual," he says, "is chiefly for those men who are missionaries in foreign regions...to learn the foreign languages" in use where they were serving. "It is also for confessors," he continues, "so that they can understand the meaning of the feelings concealed in the hearts of the foreign peoples..., especially for confessors in those areas which foreigners frequent." He adds that the book is for "those of advanced years who have been deterred from taking the orders by the tediousness of grammatical studies." It is also, he says, for those "for whom the work of learning vocabulary for many years is vexing, who do not wish to undertake the work which is common to the 'intricate' method in popular use. This manual," he says, "yields a more fruitful command of vocabulary for students of grammar and rhetoric in three months than any other will in three whole years; this is true," he claims, "not only of the vocabulary of the modern languages, but also for Hebrew, Greek, and Latin." He goes on to say:

> It is very appropriate for teachers who wish to teach the fundamentals of the vocabulary that occurs in all the authors, for many words in the works examined in the *trivium* courses are contained in this volume. And it will also be helpful for travelers who will by using it be able in the shortest time possible to collect a 'forest' of words used in another country. It will also useful for those who are involved in various business dealings, for example, those who are sent to speak with the heads of state, for learning foreign idiomatic usages in a short time. And it will prove useful for remedying the negative effects of not being able to attend a public school for servants in noble houses. It is for those who wish to spare the expense of years of study in the humanities. And it will assist those who wish to learn the noble modern languages, such as Italian, Spanish, German, and French, in the comprehension of vocabulary. (as cited in Corcoran, 1911, pp. 266-269).

Task/Objectives Analysis

In the first chapter of his introduction, Bathe divides the learning of languages into four elements or component skill areas: words, syntax, idiomatic phrases, and style (Corcoran, 1911). This four-fold division resembles a modern high-order task analysis. Then, in chapter three, he suggests that while both vocabulary and syntax could effectively be learned using his "via media," the first edition of his text would deal only with the first element. From his discussion throughout the introduction, it can be conjectured that Bathe intended to add to the text—or perhaps even create an additional manual—to explicate his method for learning syntax using this "middle way" method. However, he died shortly before the publication of his first edition and was unable to accomplish his plan; but two translators/editors of later editions of Bathe's work took his plans to heart and found a way to teach syntax using his "via media." These two editions will be discussed later. For now, let us remark on the practical wisdom Bathe demonstrated by focusing on an objective relating to a single element in his task analysis for the prototype of his method.

Design

Bathe's prescient anticipation of modern instructional design methodology evident in his extensive analyses of need, audience, tasks, and objectives extended to the design phase, as well. As with the analysis, the primary evidence for his attentiveness can be found in the introductory matter of the first edition. Chapters three through seven, nine, and ten make explicit the plan behind the method and give guidelines for implementing it in later editions. Chapter eight, in fact, bears a startling resemblance to a management plan. Bathe leaves explicit instructions for those who will perpetuate his work about how to do so in accordance with his original design (Corcoran, 1911).

Because Bathe passed away before his product could be implemented, evaluated, and revised, that part of the ISD process were of necessity left to others. As mentioned above, two of the editors of later editions of the *Janua* added to the manual exercises to assist the learner in assimilating the second element of language identified by Bathe: the syntax. There are anecdotal records of experiments with the manual to gauge its effectiveness (Corcoran, 1911); the results of these experiments are commonly reported as testimonials in the prefatory material of various editions of the textbook and are therefore rather historically suspect. However, the important point is that some sort of evaluation was occurring per Bathe's instructions.

Bathe's Ideas about Learning

As an educator, Bathe was aware of many of the problems currently being discussed by modern educational theorists. For example, in chapter three of the introduction to the *Janua*, Bathe explicitly acknowledges the problems of cognitive load and the decontextualization of knowledge caused by rote memorization of definitions and rules. "How is it," he asks, "that in learning syntax some adopt the 'rule-way,' and some the 'ruleless-way,' while in learning words no one sets before himself the 'rule-way,' by thoroughly learning a series of words? For this, three reasons can be given. First, that vocabularies contain many unusual words, useless for the purposes of many learners. Secondly," he continues, "that a close connection exists between many words, and so, when one fundamental word is known as the source of others, these are very easily inferred from it.... When the meaning of one of them is known beforehand, the rest easily follow and so do not call for any special effort on the part of a learner." And finally, he adds, "the third and main reason is that words in a vocabulary [list] lack significance; from this it follows that the memory, deprived of the assistance of the intelligence, cannot keep firm hold on them" (as cited in Corcoran, 1911, pp. 72-73). Bathe's arguments bear an unmistakable resemblance to the tenets of Meaningful Reception Learning as explicated by Ausubel, Novak, and Hanesian (1978).

Bathe's perceptiveness when it comes to learning and to the design of instructional materials, especially when his work is compared to modern theories and principles, was phenomenal. Not only does his acuity lend credence to his historically-acclaimed position as one of the preeminent educators in the post-Renaissance West (Nolte, 1768, as cited in Corcoran, 1911), but it also suggests that modern foreign language teachers and instructional designers alike could derive great benefits from examining and applying certain elements of his methodology and techniques. The following section of this paper will provide an example of how one such technique found in this historical textbook could be applied to modern foreign language pedagogy.

A New Historical Approach to an Old Problem

One of the problems that continues to plague teachers of foreign languages at the secondary and university level is the students' use of a "pony," i.e., a literal translation, to assist them in completing their translation assignments. Due to the wide availability of such translations and the tendency for students to choose the path of least resistance when it comes to completing homework, the use of such crutches is not bound to end. Though I would not suggest that it is appropriate in all instances, it is my contention that as teachers of foreign languages, we can use supplemental exercises to guide the students' use of the "pony" in ways that will work to their advantage rather than their detriment, as can be demonstrated through two specific examples from Bathe's textbook.

The Arrangement of Bathe's Book

One of the more interesting aspects of Bathe's text—and one of the most informative for the problem of modern foreign language pedagogy posed above—is that it employed facing text and translation, much as a modern "pony" does today. The sentences in the language to be acquired were found on the right-hand leaf and the literal translation of the sentences into the native language on the left. Some editors made the translations interlinear while others made multiple columns in order to show the sentences rendered into as many as six languages across the double leaf (Corcoran, 1911).

Though the arrangement of the book appears at first glance to be more an issue of message design than of instructional design, the exercises that encourage the learners to actively engage both the text and translation simultaneously and to manipulate the material in a way that facilitates the abstraction of vocabulary and principles of syntax reveal the centrality of message design in the overall instructional design.

Harmar's English Edition

John Harmar, Regius Professor of Greek at Magdalen College, Oxford, edited and oversaw publication of two English editions of the *Janua Linguarum*. Harmar, in the introduction to his first edition (the sixth English

edition, published in 1623), reports in detail the alterations he saw fit to make to the *Janua*, alterations that were "sufficiently commended both by diverse experiments, and by five editions past." These changes included making the translation "more significant and correspondent to the Latin, and more clearly to reflect on it" (as cited in Corcoran, 1911, p. 98). That is, he made the vernacular translation more precisely literal. He also refined the Classical Latinity of the sentences themselves so they would be of more immediate use to teachers and students of Classical Latin. Finally, he added directions for manipulating the Latin text in such a way as to make the "concord of words" (i.e., syntax and word order), the second element of language identified by Bathe, explicit to the students: he directs the students "to construe by letters pointing out the grammatical position and sequence of the words" (as cited in Corcoran, p. 99). The student, when faced with a sentence such as the one that follows (sentence number 9 of 1200 in the *Janua*), *Hoc momentum, unde pendet aeternitas*, would have written something approximating the following string of letters: Adj[ective] N[oun] Adv[erb] V[erb] N[oun], thereby indicating the part of speech of each word in the order in which it appears in the language to be acquired.

Harmar apparently believed that with the modifications described above the book would displace all other beginning Latin texts, which he styles "elementary trash," for teaching the fundamentals of Classical Latin (Corcoran, 1911). Indeed, by increasing the Latinity of the sentences and the correctness of the translations, he prepared a text suitable for teaching all four of Bathe's elements: vocabulary, syntax, idiomatic phrases, and style. For as the students actively manipulated the text, they would of necessity have encountered phrases and idiomatic translations as well as the general style of the Latin language.

Applications to Modern Foreign Language Pedagogy

Harmar's pedagogical method could be easily adapted to modern use for both ancient and modern languages. Working with a facing literal translation, students could be assigned to use letters to indicate the parts of speech of each element in a sentence in a passage of text by the author being studied. To increase the difficulty of the exercise, the students could be instructed to indicate the syntactical function of each word within the sentence as well as its part of speech and to note differences in syntactical function or idiom between the two languages. Ideally, the passage used for this exercise would be different than the passage used for whole-task practice but by the same author.

Several instructional advantages could be derived from such an exercise. First, the students would be able to focus on syntax and word order without any but the most cursory attention to the semantics of the sentence; such would be the advantage of having a literal translation readily available for consultation. This type of scaffolding reduces the cognitive load, thereby increasing the cognitive resources available to attend to the syntactical patterns. Second, with sufficient practice, the students will eventually assimilate schemata for the syntactical patterns not only of the language in general but also of the specific author under consideration. Each additional sentence analyzed in this way will assist in the tuning of these syntactical schemata (van Merriënboer, 1997). Third, as Bathe himself pointed out with regards to learning vocabulary, the syntax, when situated in an authentic environment is much easier to learn and remember than when learned as a list of decontextualized rules. This last point, again, is the basic tenet of the Meaningful Reception Learning theory (Ausubel et al., 1978).

The Portuguese Edition

In 1623, Dom Mauro de Roboredo published his *Porta de Linguas*, a Portuguese translation of Bathe's *Janua*. He expresses in the preface his intent to "extend the usefulness of the original edition by adding, on its own expressed plan, a Portuguese version" (as cited in Corcoran, 1911, p. 107). In addition to simply adding a literal Portuguese translation of the Latin sentences, he made slight changes to the message design, as well. Roboredo retained both the Latin and Spanish sentences in their original positions but added his Portuguese translation above the Spanish translation on the left-hand side of the page. Then he connected the corresponding elements of the sentences in all three languages with numerals (Corcoran). Using the same sentence from the *Janua* as in the previous example, an example of Roboredo's rendering would have been as follows: *Hoc momentum, unde pendet aeternitas*. A literal English translation following the same plan would read: This is the moment from which eternity hangs.

Applications to Modern Foreign Language Pedagogy

This unique element of message design found in the Portuguese edition of the *Janua* suggests possibilities for use in modern foreign language instruction. Using a passage of text in a facing literal translation, the students could be assigned to use numerals to connect corresponding elements in the sentences of the foreign and native languages.

The advantages to this exercise would be several. First, the exercise would encourage students to actively engage both text and translation simultaneously, thereby drawing attention to both the foreign word and its equivalent in the students' native tongue and taking maximum advantage of the scaffolding inherent in such a format. Second, the students would be exposed to much more vocabulary than they would be if they were expected to look up each unfamiliar word in a dictionary (van Merriënboer, 1997). Furthermore, the students would have at their fingertips a model of expert translation: they would see the various nuances of a particular word and also how the literal definitions of words are influenced by surrounding words to form a coherent thought or idiomatic expression (van Merriënboer). Fourth, students are more likely to remember vocabulary when they encounter new vocabulary words in the context of a complete thought, as Bathe himself pointed out. Today we would muster the tenets of MRL as support for this statement (Ausubel et al., 1978). Fifth, the second, third, and fourth elements of language, as articulated by Bathe (i.e., syntax, idiomatic phrases, and style) would also be called to the students' attention as they moved systematically through the passage; and, as mentioned earlier, because the semantics would not be tying up their cognitive resources, a greater amount of attentional resources would be free to assimilate syntactical schemata, idiomatic renderings of certain phrases, and the stylistic patterns of the author under consideration (van Merriënboer).

Conclusions

Contemporary testimonials and the overwhelming popularity of the book on the basis of numbers alone aver that the exercises contained in the *Janua Linguarum* were successful for teaching the rudiments of vocabulary and syntax in the 17th century, but their effectiveness then and their potential for effectiveness now can also be verified by their correspondence to modern instructional design principles and learning theories. The major principles exemplified in the *Janua Linguarum* include: 1) scaffolding novices in several component skill areas to allow them to successfully engage in authentic practice activities as soon as possible (van Merriënboer, 1997); 2) reducing cognitive load by reducing the number of component skills being practiced at one time (van Merriënboer); 3) modeling expert translation (van Merriënboer); 4) increasing the automaticity of rule-based or recurrent component skills through more encounters with vocabulary and syntax (van Merriënboer); 5) assisting the assimilation and tuning of syntactical schemata by encouraging students to make patterns explicit through the use of semantically insignificant symbols (van Merriënboer); 6) requiring thoughtful engagement from the learner (van Merriënboer); 7) encouraging learners to assimilate vocabulary from a meaningful context rather than by rote memorization (Ausubel et al., 1978); and 8) increasing students' motivation to learn by providing authentic early experiences with the texts (Keller, 1987).

It is my argument that the adherence of the exercises from the *Janua Linguarum* discussed in this paper to principles of good instructional design justify not only reinstating this antique use of the "pony" in modern foreign language pedagogical methods, but also justifies using a new historical approach to instructional design to infuse our modern approaches to foreign language pedagogy with the sustaining lifeblood of tried and true methodology.

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